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ABSTRACT

The importance of an interdisciplinary learning center as a supporting element for the academic program was stressed. The various services such a center can perform for students and faculty are described. The development of the Learning Center at the Community College of Delaware County, Media, Pennsylvania, was traced as a point of departure for comparison and discussion of such centers. Both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the center's growth were described. Since it began in 1968, it has grown from 38 students and a part-time reading specialist to 875 students and six staff members, plus adjunct professionals from the academic departments. It s services have expanded from help with reading comprehension, vocabulary, basic grammar, and term paper and study skills to include a full reading program, developmental programs in English and mathematics, a foreign language open lab, and voluntary referral. (NH)

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THE LEARNING CENTER: ITS ROLE AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE JUNIOR COLLEGE

Friday, May 8, 10:45 - 11:45 a.m.

"The Learning Center in the Junior College"

The Learning Center is a fundamental supporting element for the academic program. It is interdisciplinary in its orientation for it provides counseling in the fundamentals that are essential to every academic discipline. It uses and directs the use of all supporting elements to the academic program, particularly the library and the instructional media center. It provides individualized academic counseling in a variety of academic skills, including improving study skills. It attempts to develop a degree of academic and social self-confidence in the student, by making him less dependent on study habits and skills which are not amenable to the needs of college. The Learning Center serves the faculty in a number of fundamental ways:

1. it provides them with more time to devote to more creative activities;
2. it tends to assure that students are better prepared to assume a degree of independent responsibility for studying;
3. it provides them with ready access to specialists for referral and guidance.

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The Learning Center of the Community College of Delaware County

The development of a Learning Center will vary with geography and experience, but perhaps the experience of the Community College of Delaware County will serve as a point of departure for comparison and discussion. (See Figure 1)

The Community College of Delaware County opened in the Fall of 1967 with 310 students. It was not until late in the Fall semester that it became apparent that many students admitted to the first class did not possess the necessary study habits or reading ability for success in college. This recognized deficiency generated a need for a developmental reading program.

An ancedotal record of the development of the Reading and Study Laboratory (named The Learning Center in June, 1969) has two important aspects -- quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative growth is presented in Figure 1 to indicate the staff and fiscal commitment made by the College. The qualitative aspects of this experience are far more significant because they focus attention upon the product of the experience, which at this stage is difficult to measure, being more subjective than objective. Yet even this mode of measure is a valuable research technique, and one that will be used in this preliminary report. Future reports will reflect more quantitative measures based upon a refinement of data about students using the services of The Learning Center.

Quantitative Development

Figure 1 illustrates the quantitative growth of The Learning Center indicating an enrollment growth from thirty-eight students to eight hundred and seventy-five, which does not include an undetermined amount of referrals. It also indicates a staffing commitment by the College of from a part-time reading specialist to a Coordinator of The Learning Center and six staff members plus adjunct professionals from the academic departments. The College has made a further commitment to The Learning Center by giving it area status within the Department of Instructional Resources.

The activities of The Learning Center have expanded from a developmental reading program to include Developmental Mathematics, English and an open laboratory approach to Foreign Language, without losing an individualized approach to remedial instruction.

Qualitative

Thirty-eight (38) students were registered for the reading development program in the spring semester, 1968. There was no available time to schedule a reading placement test for all students. Therefore, the program's enrollment was on a voluntary basis. A part-time reading specialist was hired to give class instruction in the reading comprehension and study skills.

Certain problems prevented the establishment of an ideal reading program; these included class scheduling, inappropriate materials and a lack of educational research concerning the reading needs and abilities of junior college students. Fortunately, the reading program did have the support of the faculty, administration and, more importantly, students who realized their deficiencies and need for a more comprehensive reading and study skills ability. Due to the student's motivation, some success was achieved.

The expenditure for this semester was limited to the salary for the part-time reading specialist.

The Reading and Study Laboratory was established in the College's temporary quarters in the fall semester of 1968. A laboratory area, testing room, office space and classroom were made available to the now full time reading specialist.

All incoming freshmen were required to take the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. The results were sobering. Two students out of 1050 scored at the secondary level. Through effective counseling and student motivation, voluntary enrollment in the reading program jumped from a previous thirty-eight students to 472 students. Reading classes and laboratory sessions were scheduled during free periods between scheduled classes. The program offered three developmental credits. Ability grouping occurred within these scheduled classes. Materials were acquired from the secondary reading programs in Delaware County schools. A work study student was assigned to the program to assist with record keeping and distribution of materials.

Some success was apparent by the end of the semester, due to student motivation and cooperation, and an expanding amount of available materials. Students willingly worked with one another in the areas of spelling and vocabulary development. The specialist instructed students in the necessary study skills required for the various academic areas. Reading comprehension, vocabulary and spelling exercises were developed using the required academic area textbooks.

Special meetings, aside from their regularly scheduled reading classes, instructed the students in the methods for writing a term paper. The specialist, schooled in group dynamics, began voluntary sessions with discussions usually centered around the problems associated with college freshman.

The need for additional assistance in the Reading and Study Laboratory recognized during the previous semester was met in the spring semester, 1969. Some of the students needed more direction than could be given by a work-study student during laboratory sessions. Therefore, a reading technician was hired to assist the reading specialist during laboratory sessions and to provide clerical assistance for the entire program.

A part time reading specialist was placed under contract to instruct students during the evening class hours. This was not a desirable contract on the part of either the students or the instructor. A reading program should provide as much academic counseling to students as they may need. Many students develop, for themselves, an unprecedented educational rapport with their reading instructors. Many students come to depend upon their reading instructor for assistance in

all academic areas. Neither the ten month nor the part time contract allows enough time for either the student to seek or the instructor to give the assistance required. It was felt at the time that at least two twelve-month contracts were needed for an effective program in reading instruction and study skills assistance.

New instructional resources appeared on the market. During this semester, many students came to the reading laboratory who were not registered for reading classes. They expressed their need for assistance in the requirements of the various academic areas. These requirements ranged from the methods used in effective textbook reading to the preparation of a term paper. The reading program, therefore, took on another dimension--voluntary student referral.

Developmental English and mathematics are two courses offered to students who lack the necessary preparation for either occupational or college parallel programs. Through previous experience and faculty initiative, these two programs investigated the possible utilization of the reading laboratory for individual instruction and programmed assistance for their respective areas. The reading laboratory was willing to cooperate in this development.

The fall semester of 1969 witnessed the opening of The Learning Center of the Community College of Delaware County. The various placement tests (see figure 1, Fall, 1969) dictated the assignment of 775 students to the Center for developmental individualized instruction.

The reading program, through an increased budget, contracted two twelve-month and two part time reading specialists. Another laboratory technician was employed to assist in the expanding amount of clerical work and distribution of materials. These technicians need not be professional people by granted degree but rather be mature, responsible adults interested in the philosophy of the program and student progress. Experience has shown that working college students do not possess the depth of understanding or concern for their fellow students that this position requires. However, work-study students may be helpfully employed to assist with the clerical operations of the program.

The open laboratory concept for foreign language study was, up to this time, impossible to accommodate in the College's temporary location. However, as part of a much larger program, it was rather easy to incorporate this concept into The Learning Center.

The Learning Center now occupies renovated facilities. Areas were partitioned for the various functions of the Center, carpeting was laid to absorb some of the noise caused by a constant motion of students entering and leaving, an enclosed area was built to house a typing lab open for any student for any typing need, new furniture, instruments and materials were added.

Professional assistance comes from the Humanities' and Mathematics' departments. Instructors from both areas meet their students three times a week, once in a class session and twice in the Learning Center. The Center provides them with some clerical assistance.

As of this writing it is too early for empirical results but the program seems to be working well. The Center accommodates 875 students per week, the teachers are feeling the benefits of individualized instruction for their students and the students are responding well to this new method of learning. They appear to be more at ease in the learning situation because it is easier for them to approach their teachers with questions.

Two years from now the College will move into its permanent facility. This is a worthwhile testing period for the Learning Center. Needs and priorities are being established. Satellite learning centers for each academic area are being designed and will be incorporated in the temporary facilities. Future reports will include the results of the present program as well as the addition of the remaining academic areas to the Learning Center.

Figure 1. THE LEARNING CENTER--QUANTITATIVE GROWTH STUDY

	Spring 1968	Fall 1968	Spring 1969	Fall 1969
Testing Program	No test administered	Nelson-Denny Reading Test administered to all incoming Freshmen	Nelson-Denny Reading Test	Reading Placement Test Developmental English Placement Test Developmental Mathematics Placement Test A.C.T. College Boards
Enrollment	Voluntary enrollment 38 students	Voluntary enrollment 472 students.	Voluntary enrollment 368 students Voluntary referral - unlimited	500 Reading Students (Voluntary) 175 English students 100 Math students 100 Foreign Language students--voluntary referral
Personnel	Part-Time Reading Specialist	Full-Time Reading Specialist Work-Study student	Reading Specialist Laboratory Technician Work-Study student	2 Reading specialists 2 Laboratory Technicians 2 Part-Time Reading Teachers Professional support from involved academic areas
Scheduling	Two Class Meetings per week	Same	Same	Reading - Two Classes, Three Lab. English - One Class, Two Lab. Math - Two Classes, One Lab. Foreign Language - Open Lab.
Activities	Reading Comprehension Vocabulary Basic Grammer Term Paper Study Skills	Reading Comprehension Vocabulary - Spelling Basic Grammer Term Paper Study Skills Group Dynamics Voluntary Referral	Reading Program Developmental Math Developmental English Voluntary Referral	Reading Program Developmental Mathematics Developmental English Foreign Language Open Lab. Voluntary Referral
Cost	Part-Time Professional Contract	$11,000.	$4,000. additional budget	$30,000 budget & personnel support from academic areas involved.